

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Expansion Connection Project

National Capital Planning Commission
Schematic Submission for April 7, 2016 Meeting

Project Report

Introduction

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts seeks to fulfill its statutory mission by presenting and producing world class arts, supporting the creation of new artistic works, and creating and disseminating innovative and comprehensive arts education programs across the country.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is currently constructing an expansion to the existing Edward Durell Stone building, providing approximately 72,000 square feet of additional space. As the institution enters its fifth decade, this expansion will allow the Center to more fully realize its national and global leadership role in providing opportunities for enhanced public engagement and interaction with the arts while providing much-needed rehearsal, education, and public access areas in the decades to come.

The Kennedy Center Expansion Connection Project will provide a safe pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Kennedy Center and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, for the first time creating a public waterfront link to and from the Kennedy Center, the National Mall and Memorial Parks, the Potomac River waterfront, and the surrounding vicinity.

Purpose of and Need for the Project

The Kennedy Center Expansion Connection project will enable the Kennedy Center, the nation's living memorial to John F. Kennedy, to extend its outreach to the community by attracting users of the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail onto the Kennedy Center grounds, where they will be able to enjoy performances, learn more about the Kennedy Center's other programs, take a tour, enjoy a beverage at the café and learn more about President Kennedy himself. With this new pedestrian connection, visitors to the National Mall and Memorial Parks will, for the first time, have the ability to easily and safely visit all of the major presidential memorials by foot or

bike. It will also afford Kennedy Center patrons an opportunity to experience the Potomac River waterfront.

Currently, there is no direct pedestrian connection between the Kennedy Center Expansion and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, which connects the National Mall and Memorial Parks with Georgetown, along the Potomac River waterfront. Under existing conditions, pedestrians using the trail, coming from Georgetown or the National Mall can only safely and legally cross the Parkway at F Street NW, where there are two pedestrian-activated traffic signals. Once across the Parkway, they must proceed up the hill and cross F Street at the Virginia Avenue intersection, then up a large staircase to finally enter the Kennedy Center. The proposed connection will be far more convenient and accessible, in particular for visitors coming from the National Mall and Memorial Parks to the south.

For more ambitious bicyclists and pedestrians traveling between sites in Virginia and D.C., the Kennedy Center Expansion Connection will provide a convenient link between the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge pathway and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation trail.

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Description of the Project

The Kennedy Center is located at 2700 F Street NW in Washington, DC at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue NW and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The Expansion Project, approved in 2015 and currently under construction, is located to the south of the existing Kennedy Center building where open and inviting gardens will provide gathering and performance spaces, as well as lawn areas for viewing movies or performances simulcast from within the Kennedy Center theaters.

The Expansion Connection Project area is located on the west side of the Expansion Project site, crossing the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and occupying a portion of the parkland between the Parkway and the Potomac River. Existing conditions of this area include grass, trees, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the Rock Creek Multi-Use trail, an asphalt pathway along the Potomac River. The Theodore Roosevelt Bridge is located just south of the project area.



View of the project area from the Roosevelt Bridge



View of the project area looking north.

Connecting the landscaped gardens of the Kennedy Center Expansion with the Potomac River waterfront and Rock Creek Paved Recreation trail, the Expansion Connection project will consist of a lightweight steel pedestrian bridge, approximately 14 feet above the Parkway, and a fully-accessible ramp down to the trail, with several landings and viewing areas along the ramp. The walkway surface will consist of aluminum planking with a non-skid coating. Guardrails will be made of both frosted glass and steel cables with continuous handrails. One handrail will have embedded LED lights to illuminate the walking surface. The ramp has a switchback near the bottom, neatly tucked against the trail, with a short stair on the south end.

Total Area of the Site and Allocation of Land

Overall, the site area affected by the project is 5110 square feet, including the area occupied by the bridge over the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

On west side of the Parkway, the site area affected by the project (not including the bridge) is approximately 4260 square feet.

Area of Building and Site Coverage

The usable area of the bridge and ramp structure, as proposed, is 4,010 gross square feet.

Existing employment and projected employment

The Kennedy Center currently employs approximately 1,300 people, of which 580 are full time. Employment is not projected to change due to the Kennedy Center Expansion Connection project.

Relationship of the Project to the Kennedy Center's Master Plan

The Kennedy Center does not have a master plan. However, in advance of undertaking the Expansion project, a feasibility study was conducted to explore the viability of expanding the facility within the boundaries of the Center's site. The feasibility study concluded that the location of the existing parking garage south of and contiguous with the original Edward Durell Stone building was the best option for the building expansion.

Coordination with Affected Local and State Governments

The Kennedy Center Expansion Connection project was not submitted for final approval to NCPC in conjunction with the Kennedy Center Expansion project in 2015, but was held separate in order to allow for a complete environmental assessment to be performed on the Expansion Connection project alone. The Expansion Connection project environmental assessment has been undertaken by National Park Service and NCPC. See "Status of Community Participation" for detailed information on the process.

Representatives of the Kennedy Center have met with representatives of the National Park Service regarding design standards for the project and to begin the process of a transfer of jurisdiction over areas affected by the Expansion Connection project that are currently under NPS control. Additional meetings will be taking place during the spring and summer of 2016 in order to prepare a formal transfer of jurisdiction for NCPC approval. The Federal Highway Administration has offered to assist NPS and the Kennedy Center with advice and consultation on the design of the structure to help insure compliance with applicable codes and standards.

Prior to the implementation of the project, the Kennedy Center will obtain appropriate land disturbance permits and abide by local and state erosion and sediment control standards, as well as any additional approvals and reviews required prior to construction. These include approval by NCPC and CFA.

Status of Community Participation

The NPS and NCPC are preparing an environmental assessment to identify alternatives and assess the potential impacts of the project. Concurrently, the agencies are conducting consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, which was initiated with the DC Historic Preservation Office on November 9, 2015, and with the Virginia SHPO on February 17, 2016. A joint NEPA/Section 106 public scoping meeting was held at the Kennedy Center on September 29, 2015, during which the consulting parties were introduced to the project, presented with a draft area of potential effects, and invited to comment on the proposal. A 30-day public comment period was open from September 15 to October 15, 2015.

A second consulting parties meeting occurred on December 10, 2015, to present the proposed alternatives to the public and invite comment on the potential effects of the undertaking. A final consulting parties meeting was held on February 23, 2016, to further discuss the effects of the undertaking and to solicit input into ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects. The NPS's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website is being used as a tool to disseminate information on the project and to collect public comments.

Eight individuals signed in at the public scoping meeting and two comments were received during the scoping period. These individuals were in support of the project moving forward. The first commenter was not in favor of the Terrace Alternative (see below) due to potential impacts to the elderly community in the area. The second commenter indicated that viewsheds will be a critical issue, but that they were in favor of the project to reduce the isolation of the Kennedy Center.

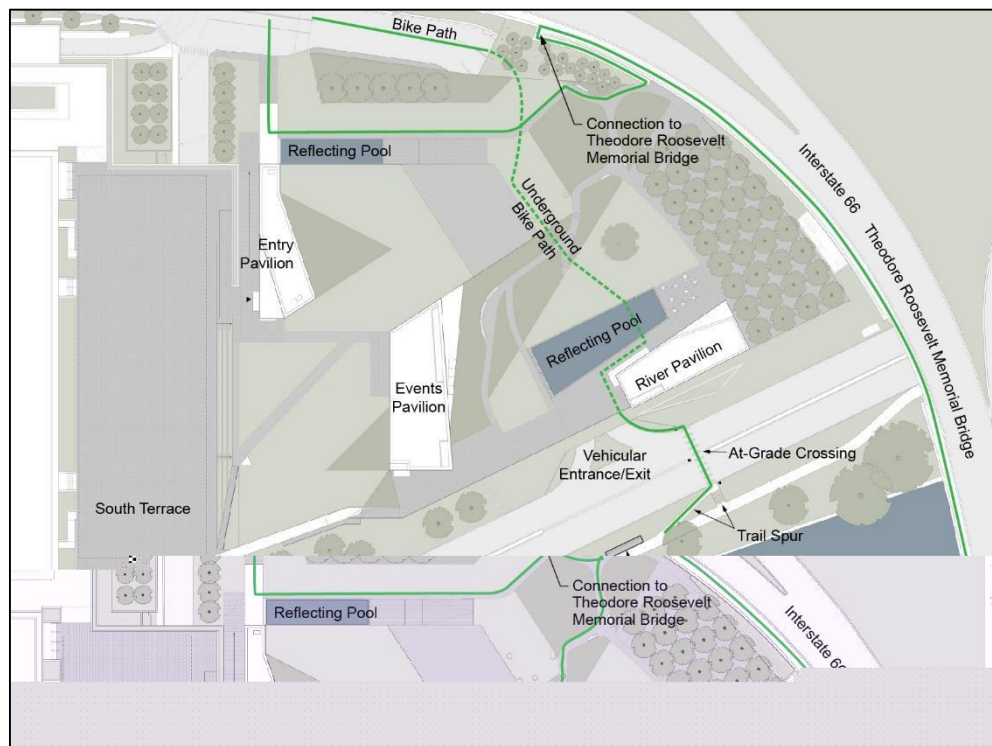
A second public consulting parties meeting was held at the Kennedy Center on December 10, 2015. Proposed alternatives were described in detail, along with renderings of the resulting views from the Parkway, the Georgetown riverfront, and various locations along the Potomac River. In addition to representatives of NPS, the Kennedy Center, NCPC, FHA and CFA, the meeting was attended by a representative from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Georgetown Business Improvement District, The Committee of 100 for the Federal City, two members of the West End Citizen's Association, and one private citizen. Discussion was held on the alternatives and their potential for adverse impacts on the cultural resources of the Kennedy Center, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Theodore Roosevelt Island, and other resources within the area of potential effects. The proposed alternatives and relevant consulting party comments are summarized below:

1. No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, the project would not be built and there would be no direct pedestrian connection to the Kennedy Center Expansion from the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail or the Potomac River.

2. At-Grade Crossing Alternative

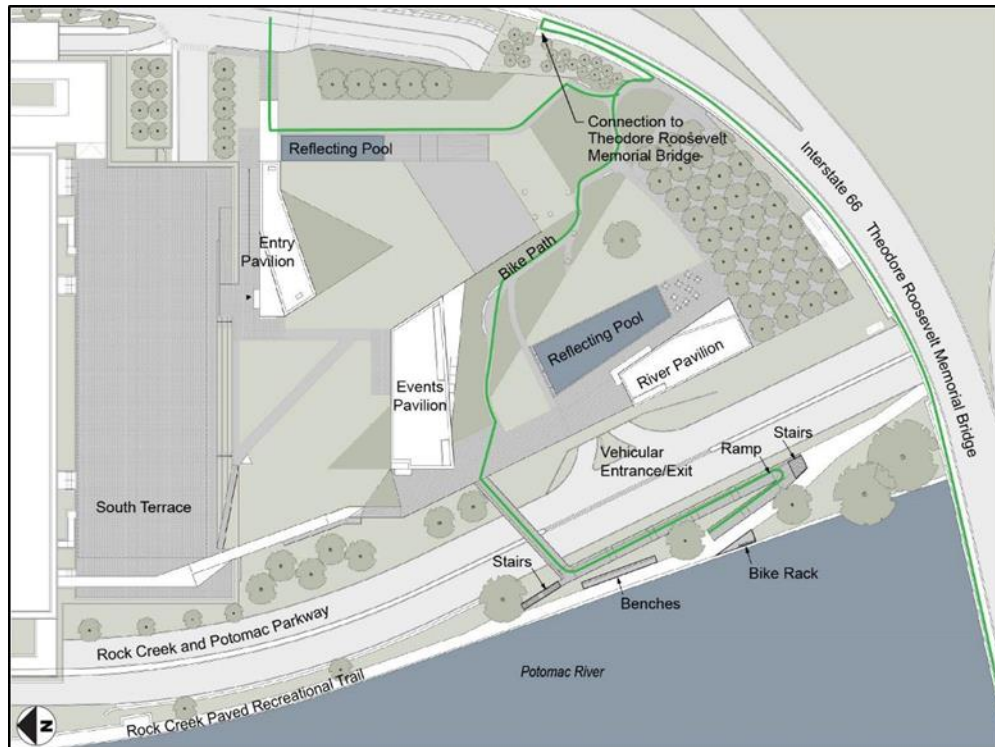
Under this alternative, pedestrians would need to cross the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and enter the new underground garage of the Kennedy Center Expansion where they would either enter the buildings at garage level or proceed up the access road and out in front of the Kennedy Center. A pedestrian-activated signal would be installed on the Parkway and two trail spurs would be constructed to connect to the existing trail.



Representatives of NPS and the Georgetown BID expressed concerns about safety, traffic impacts to the Parkway and the inconvenience of the route through the garage—especially for bicyclists. Because there will be a steep slope along the Parkway, along with air intakes located west of the River Pavilion when the Expansion Project is complete, it would not be possible to build a ramp directly from the Parkway up to the terrace level.

3. Bridge with Ramp and Stairs Alternative (Preferred Alternate)

Under this alternative, a safe, direct pedestrian and bicycle connection is created between the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the Kennedy Center Expansion and the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. Users of the trail can easily make their way onto the Kennedy Center grounds and likewise, Kennedy Center patrons can easily take in views of the river from above, or casually walk down to the seawall for an up-close experience. Along the way, there will be opportunities to stop and enjoy the view.



While the alternative diagram provided for the option of installing a long north stair, a bench along the trail, and a bike rack, the Kennedy Center is proposing to make the project less impactful, by deleting the north stair and relocating the bench and bike rack amenities to the Expansion project grounds.

4. Bridge and Ramp with Elevator Alternative

This alternative is identical to the Bridge and Ramp with Stairs alternative, with the addition of an elevator installed in lieu of the north stair. Comments on this alternative focused on the location of the elevator being in the floodway making it difficult to maintain and secure. In addition, the impact on views is far greater than the stair (or no stair) alternative as illustrated in this rendering:



Because the Ramp meets or exceeds accessibility guidelines, the elevator is not required, but future construction of an elevator would not be precluded, should it be desired and technically achievable in the future.

5. River Terrace Alternative

This alternative was considered as an independent project several years ago, but was discontinued. This Alternative would have the most adverse effects on the Parkway, and would also be the only alternative to have adverse effects on the Kennedy Center building itself.



While it would allow for large numbers of patrons to exit the Kennedy Center's main venues to the west, very few patrons approach the Center from this direction. This alternative would not provide direct access to the Expansion project, or a direct pedestrian and bicycle connection to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. It is the least bicycle-friendly of the four action alternatives. NPS found this alternative to have too much impact on the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. The National Mall Coalition favored a River Terrace connection to the other alternatives, but stated a preference for a different design.

The third and final consulting parties meeting was held at NCPC on February, where the draft Assessment of Effects was presented and discussion was initiated on any potential mitigation or minimization for the project. At this time, the Kennedy Center shared its preference to build the Bridge and Ramp with Stairs alternative. As a minimization item, the Kennedy Center expressed its desire to delete the long north stair. This would substantially lessen the footprint of the structure and reduce the blockage of river views from the Parkway. The bench and bike rack shown along the seawall would be relocated—the bench to the ramp itself, and bike racks will be provided on the Kennedy Center grounds, near the building entrances.

The draft EA will be made available for public review and comment from March 23 through April 23, 2015. The EA will be placed on the NPS's PEPC website and a press release will be issued on the Kennedy Center and NPS websites. All environmental assessment documentation will be completed prior to preliminary and final NCPC approval of the Connection Project, currently anticipated for July 2016.

Schedule for Construction and Occupancy

Construction of the Kennedy Center Expansion Connection is proposed to commence in early 2017 and be completed and ready for use by mid-2018.

Funding

The project will be fully funded with private funds. No Federal funds will be used for the project.

Transportation Management Program

Because the employment level will not change as a result of this project a Transportation Management Program has not been prepared.